

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
TOWN SELECT BOARD
SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of December 18, 2018**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Board members Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, K. David Maxwell, and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, Peter J. DeMasi (Fire Chief), Dan Currier (Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission), and Elroy Hill.

Chair Goslant called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):

- a. Dan Currier, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) Program Manager: Highway Road Surface Management System (RSMS) Program Update/Capital Plan.** Mr. Currier often assists the municipality with matters related to its highway system including grant applications. He said the RSMS program is the software used to track the condition of each road in order to create a database for short- and long-term highway maintenance planning. Mr. Currier said the program breaks the Northfield highway system into one hundred and seventy (170) road segments for tracking purposes. He said roads usually are broken up into separate segments when their width changes and/or the paved section ends. In addition, road segments are categorized based upon their "importance" and their average traffic load. All roads were recently inspected and their condition evaluated. This includes whether a gravel road requires regular maintenance (i.e. grading) or if it needs to be resurfaced. Paved roads may require no special maintenance or may require crack sealing, a shim coat, or complete reconstruction. Mr. Currier also provided a handout providing estimates on how much it would cost to address these road problems. Mr. Currier said the Select Board members would need to determine their own set of priorities before drafting a capital budget for the next few years.

Board member Goodrich felt some subjective information might have been input into the RSMS program based on personal opinions and this might impact the accuracy of the database. For example, while the amount of average traffic might be quantified, the "importance" of a road might not be. Mr. Currier said some subjectivity is probably unavoidable but he added at least two (2) people were present on each road inspection and he follows the standard road manuals for determining road condition, etc. He said the "importance" of each road segment is based on whether it dead ends, the number of houses on it, if it connects to highways with higher traffic flows, etc.

Board member Maxwell believes this is the first time the full Select Board has received the RSMS data in this format. In the past, the information went to the Highway Subcommittee, which made recommendations to the full Select Board during the budget meetings. Chair Goslant asked how many Vermont municipalities use RSMS data for highway planning and for budgeting purposes. Mr. Currier felt it was around eleven (11) but some adopt the priorities identified in the program much more than others. Board member Goodrich asked when the road surveys were performed. Mr. Currier said the survey of the paved roads was done over one day in late September. The gravel roads were done over two days in early November. He said more detailed information on the state of culverts, etc. will be made available to the Highway Subcommittee through Manager Schulz.

Chair Goslant asked if the municipality will be receiving additional state grant funds as part of the general campaign to protect Lake Champlain from stormwater runoff, etc. Mr. Currier said Northfield already has received about \$50,000 for upgrading gravel roads adjacent to streams as part of this program and should be eligible for more funding in the near future. Manager Schulz confirmed this work was done on Dole Hill Road and Colson Road.

Mr. Currier said this particular grant-in-aid grant program is administered through the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) and was originally authorized for three (3) years. The \$50,000 Northfield received was from the initial year and Manager Schulz said he is still waiting to hear back on grant applications he submitted during the program's second year. Mr. Currier believes it is quite likely the program will be extended through a fourth and fifth year. He added there also are Vermont Better Roads grants available through the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans).

Mr. Currier then showed graphs indicating how local roads deteriorate quickly if not provided first routine and then "preventative" maintenance during their first ten (10) to fifteen (15) years of service. He noted just over half of Northfield's gravel roads require just routine maintenance for the time being while the rest require some level of road reconstruction. Of the paved roads, over sixty percent (60%) will require only routine maintenance in the near future. The remaining roads will need some preventative work, rehabilitation, or reconstruction. He advised it often is best to hold off on rehabilitation work until the road requires complete reconstruction. Otherwise, a significant amount of money might be wasted trying to postpone the inevitable. Mr. Currier understands it might be difficult for Select Board members to ignore resident complaints in the meantime. Board member Maxwell felt having this data on hand might make it easier to explain such deferred maintenance to the affected residents. A brief discussion followed on whether the benefits of crack sealing justified the expense. Mr. Currier will research this further.

Chair Goslant asked how much it cost to reconstruct a paved road with eighteen inches (18") of subbase work. Mr. Currier said from road shoulder to road shoulder, the estimated cost is \$180,000 per mile. Chair Goslant noted this cost might double with the installation of new culverts, etc. Board member Goodrich asked how much it cost to reconstruct gravel roads. Mr. Currier said he worked with Highway Foreman Trent Tucker on this and they came up with an estimate of about \$36 per mile. This includes the cost of the material, trucking it in, installation, etc. Board member Maxwell asked how often this had to be done. Mr. Currier said every three (3) years or so. He added most Vermont towns no longer put down mat because it makes the road ungradable after a couple years. Chair Goslant noted it also shifts around during Mud Season. Manager Schulz added it is expensive to install and to maintain.

Mr. Currier then discussed the "Maintenance Financial Plan" part of his presentation, which provided cost estimates for the paved and gravel road segments requiring only routine maintenance. For gravel roads, this includes grading and dust control and the estimated total cost is \$25,000. Mr. Currier then turned to the paved roads and for minor repairs, i.e. crack sealing, the estimated total cost was \$21,000. Manager Schulz noted crack sealing is rarely done in Vermont due to poor subbase conditions and cold winters. Mr. Currier agreed it was only a short-term fix due to road shifting, etc.

In his "Capital Financial Plan" presentation, Mr. Currier provided cost estimates for any road requiring some road resurfacing or reconstruction. For gravel roads, in most cases this involves the addition of four to six inches (4"-6") of gravel to the road surface. If all the gravel roads needing this were done in a single year, it would cost about \$817,980. Chair Goslant noted it will be the Select Board's responsibility to determine which roads should be done first as this process is spread over a few years for budgeting purposes.

Mr. Currier said the cost of repaving (i.e. shim coat) or reconstructing all the paved roads needing it would cost a total of \$1,366,025. The most expensive projects would be to reconstruct Cox Brook Road (\$285,750) and a section of Union Brook Road (\$470,250). He added applying a shim coat will prolong the life of the road for seven (7) years with regular maintenance while a completely reconstructed road should last twenty (20) years.

Board member Maxwell asked how often VTrans repaves Vermont Route 12. Mr. Currier said this was done every ten (10) to fifteen (15) years. VTrans also provides regular maintenance in the interim with crack sealing, shim coating on bad spots, etc. He added the next step for the municipality is to develop a five-year plan prioritizing which problem roads should be addressed first based on road importance, traffic flow, etc. As the work is done and roads repaired, the RSMS program will be updated to reflect the new road conditions.

Board member Goodrich then thanked Mr. Currier for the valuable information provided tonight. Mr. Currier will continue to meet with Manager Schulz, Mr. Tucker, and the Highway Subcommittee as the five-year plan is developed.

III. BUDGET WORK SESSION

- a. Northfield Fire Department (NFD).** In discussing his department's operating expenditures budget, Fire Chief Peter J. DeMasi noted personnel costs for the next fiscal year will remain about the same as in the current fiscal year. Among the contract services, the cost of dispatching services should increase by about three percent (3%). In the administrative budget, Manager Schulz said the projected costs of insurance in the initial budget should drop since the rates have lowered since it was drafted last month. Chief DeMasi would like the school/training line item to remain at \$1,000 as he encourages as many of his volunteers as possible to attend the two-day training courses. There was no objection. The materials/supply budgets will remain about the same as Chief DeMasi doesn't anticipate any costly vehicle repairs in the next fiscal year since most of his fleet is relatively new. He added most repair work was done in-house at the Fire Station.

In the NFD Capital Equipment Plan (CEP), Chief DeMasi noted new valves were purchased out of the Equipment/Hose/Pumps account, which lowered its current balance to \$871.79. An additional \$4,000 will be added to this account when the next fiscal year starts July 1, 2019. The Air Pacs account will rise from \$8,000 to \$9,000 to reflect higher equipment costs. One of the thermal imaging cameras is scheduled for replacement in FY 2019-2020 and there are sufficient funds in the NFD CEP budget to cover this \$10,000 expense. The aerial ladder truck is scheduled for replacement in FY 2027-2028 and the municipality will budget \$11,500 for this in the next fiscal year with another \$20,000 coming from Norwich University (NU) as part of its agreement with the municipality. This agreement requires an annual on-campus aerial ladder training session and this was done on October 22, 2018. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio said the normal practice with such expensive equipment purchases is for the municipality to budget half the purchase price and borrow the balance. She noted if the current agreement with NU is renewed on similar terms over the next decade, it might not be necessary to borrow funds.

Chief DeMasi is hoping to purchase a good used aerial ladder truck for about \$300,000 when the time comes. Board member Maxwell met with NU President Richard Schneider recently and received the impression NU considers this a crucial piece of equipment to ensure fire safety for the campus. He believes NU will continue to provide funds for its scheduled replacement.

Chief DeMasi said the 1993 tanker truck was scheduled for replacement last year but this purchase was postponed for another year. He has obtained cost estimates from E-One and believes a tanker with a four-wheel drive chassis could be purchased for about \$330,000. A two-wheel drive version could be purchased for about \$250,000 but he does not recommend this. Ms. Baroffio said this is another high value equipment purchase for which the municipality budgets only half the replacement cost and borrows the balance. Chair Goslant asked if it were possible to find a good used tanker truck at a reduced cost. Chief DeMasi said this was unlikely as most fire department keep these trucks for twenty (20) to thirty (30) years until they are no longer serviceable.

Board member Doney asked why Chief DeMasi preferred the four-wheel drive version. Chief DeMasi said more homes are being built on the backroads (with difficult driveways) that are too difficult for two-wheel drive vehicles. He added the NFD will send the tanker truck to neighboring communities as part of Mutual Aid and their backroads are no better. It is possible to put on tire chains if a two-wheel drive tanker is purchased. It was noted the current balance in the tanker replacement account is \$185,000 and another \$26,400 will be added in July 2019. Ms. Baroffio noted any borrowing bond that spread payment over five (5) years would require a public vote. Manager Schulz would like Chief DeMasi to further investigate whether a good used tanker can be located. Board member Doney felt a used truck would have a lower lifespan and the purchase amount would have to be on hand when it became available; otherwise, some other fire department might swoop in and snatch it. This issue will be revisited at a future budget meeting.

Chief DeMasi noted the 1999 brush truck is scheduled for replacement in FY 2021-2022. However, since the vehicle's frame is in good shape, he recommended installing a new body for about \$8,000 and this would delay replacement until FY 2027-2028. The vehicle is only used ten (10) to fifteen (15) times each year. It was suggested some brush truck replacement funds could be transferred into the tanker replacement account.

Chief DeMasi stated in the past year NFD purchased an asset management program for about \$7,000 using donation funds. This program will allow for a complete inventory of all NFD equipment located within the Fire Station as well as anything normally kept installed on the fire trucks. There is a three-year service contract for the software that costs \$1,420 each year and Chief DeMasi was wondering if the municipality would assume this cost. If not, it could be paid out of donation funds. Ms. Baroffio noted the Accounting Department already tracks NFD vehicles and major equipment that are capitalized and depreciate in value over time. It does not keep track of smaller equipment like hand tools, etc. Manager Schulz felt the annual service charge was excessive. Board member Doney believes it is good for an emergency service to keep a full up-to-date inventory of all its equipment. He believed the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) might benefit from such a software program. Board member Maxwell would like to know if the service charge could be spread out over several departments if the other emergency services also would use this software. Chief DeMasi will look into this.

Chief DeMasi then was thanked by the Select Board members for his budget presentation. The unresolved issues will be discussed at a future budget meeting.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled). There was none.

V. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Doney, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of January 8, 2019.